

Democratic chairman calls for Coble to resign chairmanship

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The Democratic National Committee has called on North Carolina congressman Howard Coble to resign his subcommittee chairmanship after remarks suggesting Japanese-Americans were interned during World War II for their own protection.

The committee passed a resolution urging Coble, a Greensboro Republican, to step down from his post as chairman of the House Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security subcommittee, according to a statement released this week.

"In our work to keep our country safe from terrorism, policy-makers have an obligation to balance the need to protect our homeland and safeguard the constitutional rights of all American citizens and residents," Democratic Chairman Terry McAuliffe said in the statement.

"U.S. Rep. Coble is not fit to lead our country on security and constitutional matters and must resign from the chairmanship," the statement said.

A spokeswoman for Coble declined comment Thursday. She said she had not seen the resolution but had requested the document from the committee.

The resolution is the latest criticism Coble has drawn since indicating on a Greensboro radio show Feb. 4 that Japanese-Americans were interned for their own safety.

"We were at war. They Japanese (Americans) - were an endangered species," Coble said. "For many of these Japanese-Americans, it wasn't safe for them to be on the street."

He disagreed with a caller who said Arab-Americans should be confined.

Like most Arab-Americans today, Coble said, most Japanese-Americans during World War II were not America's enemies. Still, Coble said, Roosevelt had to consider the nation's security.

"Some probably were intent on doing harm to us," he said, "just as some of these Arab-Americans are probably intent on doing harm to us."

The remarks sparked protests from several minority groups. Criticism has also come from three Asian-American congressmen, Reps. Mike Honda, D-Calif., Robert Matsui, D-Calif., and David Wu, D-Ore.

The Republican National Committee could not be reached for comment Thursday, but Honda has urged GOP leaders to request that Coble resign from the chairmanship.

Activists are circulating online, fax and e-mail petitions calling for his resignation.

Coble later released a statement saying the internment was "the wrong decision and an action that should never be repeated." He said he stood by his original statement as "historical fact," but apologized if it offended anyone.

Coble's spokeswoman said Thursday his resignation from the subcommittee has not been discussed.

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